

REMARKS

This paper is responsive to the Final Office Action dated December 20, 2006 (the “Final Office Action”).

Claims 1-5, 7-18, 24-27, 29, 31, 33-37, and 39-53 were previously pending in the application. Claims 1, 8, 15, 24, 33, 41, 48, 50, and 52 have been amended in this paper. Claims 40 and 44 have been canceled in this paper and no claims have been added in this paper. Accordingly, claims 1-5, 7-18, 24-27, 29, 31, 33-37, 39, 41-43, and 45-53 are now pending.

Claims 1-5, 7-18, 24-27, 29, 31, 33-37, 39, 41-43, and 45-53 stand rejected.

Rejections under § 102(b) and 103(a)

Claims 1-4, 7-12, 14-18, 24-27, 31, 33-36, 39, 42, 43, 46, 47, 49, 51, and 53 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent Application No. 6,035,305 issued to Strevey et al. (“Strevey”). Claims 5, 13, 29, and 37 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Strevey. Claims 41, 45, 48, 50, and 52 stand rejected under § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Strevey in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,884,217 issued to Skeirik et al. (“Skeirik”).

The amendments add no new matter and are supported by the specification as originally filed. Support for the amendments may be found, for example, on p. 15 of the Specification as originally filed. While not conceding that the cited reference qualifies as prior art, but instead to expedite prosecution, Applicant has chosen respectfully to address the rejection in the Office Action as follows. Applicant reserves the right, for example in a continuing application, to establish that one or more of the cited references do not qualify as prior art as to an invention embodiment previously, currently, or subsequently claimed. Applicant respectfully submits that

the pending claims are patentable and respectfully requests reconsideration of the pending rejections in view of the amendments and remarks presented herein.

Applicant respectfully submits that various limitations of pending claim 1 are not disclosed in the cited portions of Strevey and Skeirik. As amended, independent claim 1 recites:

1. A computer implemented method of customizing a product comprising:
 providing a set of one or more customizable product classes;
receiving a customizable class rule in a natural language template;
 receiving a request to designate a customizable product class from the set of customizable product classes as a customizable product instance;
 receiving a request to associate a first component product from a set of component products with the customizable product instance; and
determining whether to associate the first component product with the customizable product instance based on the customizable class rule.

With regard to the limitation of “determining whether to associate the first component product with the customizable product instance based on the customizable class rule,” the Final Office Action appears to argue on pp. 4 and 5 that this limitation is met by various elements in Strevey. In particular, the Final Office Action cites the use of constraints (Strevey at Abstract), a “graphical option object” (Strevey at 2:52-59), a “graphical contingent relationship object” (Strevey at 2:65—3:3), “graphical constraint object” (Strevey at 3:8-10), a determination of required modules based on selected options (Strevey at 5:3-6), “option-to-option relationship information” (Strevey at 5:61-67), and the use of modules “when one or more associated options are selected” (Strevey at 9:1-10).

The cited portions of Strevey relate to the creation of a graphical “Knowledge Map” from “product information.” (Strevey at 2:36-42, 3:23-34, 4:36-44.) The following passage of

Strevey describes the input “product information” (also called “knowledge” in Strevey) and the output “Knowledge Map”:

Product information includes such data as product configuration options, modules, and the relationships between options or between options and modules. In the employment of the invention, a user gathers product information, or “knowledge,” and creates a “Knowledge Map,” which is a graphical representation of the knowledge. The Knowledge Map provides a user with a well-organized description of available product options and associated product module requirements. The user then retrieves the structured product information and creates a computer program that validates a customer's selection of product options and configures a product in accordance with the knowledge residing in the Knowledge Map. The validation and configuration program can be either a rules-based program or an object-based program, both of which are discussed in further detail below.

(Strevey at 4:36-51.)

As sources for the input “knowledge,” Strevey explains that:

At step 24, knowledge pertaining to product options and product configurations is retrieved from one or more sources. The sources may include knowledgeable experts, computer data, or printed information. At step 26, the collective product information is used to create a Knowledge Map on a computer.

(Strevey at 4:55-60.)

Applicant respectfully submits that the particular parts of the cited references that the Office Action has relied upon have not been designated as nearly as practicable, as required by 37 C.F.R. § 1.104(c)(2). In particular, the Office Action does not clearly indicate what feature of Strevey is to be understood as corresponding to Applicant’s “**customizable class rule.**”

Nevertheless, Applicant has made every effort to respond to the rejections outlined by the Office Action.

Applicant understands the Final Office Action as proposing that various “[o]ption-to-option relationship information” (Strevey at 5:61-67) and similar features of Strevey correspond to Applicant’s customizable class rule. Examples of such a relationship are illustrated by the disjunctive “OR” relationship 714 in Strevey’s FIG. 7A (Strevey at 11:31-49).

These relationships for options in Strevey are features from the input knowledge or product information. “The invention provides a pallet of graphical objects that represent **product information such as configuration options, modules, and the relationships between options or between options and modules.**” (Strevey at 3:26-30 (emphasis added).)

Thus, the Final Office Action appears to equate Applicant’s “customizable class rule” with Strevey’s “option-to-option relationship information” and other features from the input knowledge or product information in Strevey.

Even if the Final Office Action’s characterization of Strevey is correct (and Applicant does not concede this point), Applicant respectfully submits that various limitations of pending claim 1 are not disclosed in the cited portions of Strevey and Skeirik. For example, claim 1 includes “receiving a customizable class rule in a natural language template.” In order to meet this limitation, the cited references would need to teach that features from Strevey’s product information are received in a natural language template.

The cited portions of Strevey do not present such a teaching. The cited portions of Skeirik also lack such a teaching. The cited portions of Skeirik state:

(5) Preferably at least some users are also permitted to call on a build-expert procedure which can be used to construct an expert system. Knowledge is specified by user input to a set of highly constrained, substantially natural language templates. The templates use a standardized data interface (as seen by the user), which facilitates the use in the expert system of data from a wide variety of systems. The completed templates

can then be compiled to produce a runnable expert system. Preferably, the user can also retrieve, examine, and modify the input from previously specified templates. Thus, an expert system can be modified by recalling the templates which specified the current expert system, modifying them, and recompiling to generate a new runnable expert.

(Skeirik at 11:19-34.)

However, the “knowledge” in Skeirik is not related to the “knowledge” in Strevey. In particular, Skeirik’s “knowledge” does not include “option-to-option relationship information” and other features from the input knowledge or product information in Strevey. Skeirik describes “knowledge” as including “factual knowledge such as classes, attributes, allowed values, etc., which describe the objects in the domain; judgmental knowledge, which describes the domain (and its objects) in the form of rules; and control knowledge describing the problem solving process to be used by the inference procedure in processing the knowledge.” (Skeirik at 7:19-26).

More specifically, Skeirik relates to three highly constrained types of knowledge structure, as described in the following passage:

One innovative teaching in the present application is the restriction of the knowledge structure within an expert system to rules of three highly constrained types. The three rule types are: (1) retrieval rules, which each assign one of several descriptors to a name in accordance with the values of numeric inputs; (2) analysis rules, which each can assign a descriptor to a name in accordance with the descriptor/name assignments made by other rules; and (3) action rules, which either execute or don’t execute a command in accordance with the descriptor/name assignments made by other rules.

(Skeirik at 16:36-49.)

These types of knowledge structure do not include Strevey’s “option-to-option relationship information” or other features from the input knowledge or product information in

Strevey. Accordingly, even if the cited portions of Strevey and Skeirik were to be combined, the resulting combination would not yield a useful tool in which Skeirik's natural language templates would be applicable to Strevey's "option-to-option relationship information" or other product information. As a result, the combination would fail to disclose "determining whether to associate the first component product with the customizable product instance based on the customizable class rule," as set forth in Applicant's claim 1.

At least for this reason, Applicant respectfully submits that amended independent claim 1, and all claims dependent therefrom, are allowable under § 102(b) and § 103(a). At least for similar reasons, Applicant respectfully submits that amended independent claims 8, 15, 24, and 33, and all claims dependent therefrom, are also allowable under § 102(b) and § 103(a). Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests that the rejections be withdrawn.

CONCLUSION

Applicant submits that all claims are now in condition for allowance, and an early notice to that effect is earnestly solicited. Nonetheless, should any issues remain that might be subject to resolution through a telephonic interview, the Examiner is requested to telephone the undersigned.

I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Postal Service as First Class Mail in an envelope addressed to: Mail Stop RCE, Commissioner for Patents, P. O. Box 1450, Alexandria, Virginia, 22313-1450, on May 21, 2007.


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2007 May 21
Date of Signature

Respectfully submitted,



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